Ocean Rising: The Quest to Inspire the Public

Hosted by Nekton & Schmidt Ocean Institute
Part of the UN Ocean Decade Laboratory Satellite Activities.

7th July 2021

Introduction

Our ocean is the backbone of climate and life on this planet. It is a magnificent resource that quietly gives to all, but is taken for granted and rarely recognized for the role it plays in planetary and human health. In order to change this status quo, we need to inspire the public about the ocean as they are inspired by space

Nekton and Schmidt Ocean Institute held a virtual workshop in July 2021, as part of the UN Decade of Ocean Sciences for Sustainable Development - Decade Lab Series: An Inspiring and Engaging Ocean. The virtual workshop was attended by 165 people who came together to discuss how to increase engagement with the ocean through popular culture, and how to inspire the public in substantive and meaningful ways. Experts from eight industries including arts, food, fashion, sports, social media, news, literature, and gaming came together to guide a conversation with participants on how to best convey the story of the ocean and weave key messages into everyday culture using unexpected and new ways. The aim was to create a roadmap on how to reframe the ocean as exciting, relevant and accessible to broad audiences.

This summary provides reference to the discussions captured, sharing insights generated. This paper is intended to act as an accompanying resource considered alongside:

- **Editorial:** '*This is how we can inspire people to feel connected to the ocean*' -WEF, read here.

- **Ocean Rising – White Paper** – an actionable framework to engage different cultural sectors. Dive deep into the subject - read here.

- **Inspirational Talks:** 8 inspirational 5 minutes presentations from 8 inspirational leaders in different cultural sectors – given as part of the workshop. Watch here.
    1. Literature: Monique Roffey, Author of The Mermaid of Black Conch, Trinidad / UK
    2. News Media: Sandy MacIntyre, VP News, Associated Press, UK
    3. Social Media: Stephanie Smith, Social Media Lead, NASA, US
    4. Gaming: Alan Gershenfeld, E-line Media Co-Founder & President, US
    5. Food & Fishing: Dr. Serge Raemaekers, Managing Director, Abalobi, South Africa
    6. Art & the Arts: Fernanda Oyarzun, Artist & Scientist: University Catolica de la Santisima Concepcion, Chile
    7. Fashion: Tom Kay, Founder, Finisterre, UK
    8. Sports: Mark Towill, 11th Hour Racing

- **Fire-side chat -** overarching analysis of the insights from the workshops with co-hosts of the event, Jyotika Virmani, Executive Director of Schmidt Ocean Institute and Oliver Steeds, Chief Executive, Nekton. Listen [here](#).

Following the inspirational talks, participants of the workshop were split into different working groups, each chaired by the speaker representing a different aspect of cultural engagement. The sessions lasted 45minutes and each group were challenged to consider three key questions:

1. **Insights:** What motivates the public to engage in your particular subject or sector?

2. **Examples:** What is best in class that you see in your sector that we should learn from?

3. **Activities:** Suggest 3 achievable projects, or activities that you would like to see created in your sector to inspire the public with the ocean.

Onward & Beyond
The next chapter of this initiative to inspire the public about the ocean will see Schmidt Ocean Institute and Nekton continuing to collaborate and hold a series of events with different cultural sectors. The goal of each event will be to engage sector leaders to commit to creating a specific event or activity to inspire the public with the ocean.

Insights, Examples, and Suggested Activities that emerged from the virtual workshop are below.

1. Literature

Insights

- **Escapism** – the key to good storytelling is escapism. Ocean stories should have lots of opportunities for escapism.
- **Young & Old** – young and old can come together to read or share stories, so we therefore need to find ocean stories that appeal to all ages, or children's books that capture the imagination and create the wonderful, shared experience of parents and children learning together.
- **Education** – children's books are often used to augment textbooks in the classroom and to engage reluctant readers. Good books tell us things without us feeling as if we are at school.
- **Other Genres** – to increase ocean appeal, the ocean needs to be rooted, more deeply, into different literary genres beyond sci-fi and fantasy, such as graphic novels.

Positive Examples

- Herman Melville - Moby Dick
- Ernest Hemmingway - The Old Man and the Sea
- Margaret Atwood - The Year of the Flood

- Kim Stanley Robinson - Ministry of the Future
- Terry Pratchett - The Discworld Series (41 novels) (adapted for radio, theatre, film, TV, comics, games, video games, role-playing games)
- Alan Moore (Writer), Kevin O'Neill (Artist) - The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Graphic Novels (9 novels in series, including 'The Nemo Trilogy') (adapted for film starring Sean Connery))
- Sebastian Junger - The Perfect Storm (adapted for film)
- Patrick O'Brian – Aubrey/Maturin series (20 novels) (adapted for film starring Russell Crowe)
- C. S. Forester – Horatio Hornblower series (10 novels)
- Rachel Carson - The Sea Around Us
- Jules Verne - Twenty thousand leagues under the sea
- Ann Moral Lindberg - A Gift from the Sea
- Rick Riordan - Percy Jackson and the Olympians series (5 books) (adapted for film, graphic novels)
- Peter Benchley - Jaws
- Assorted Clive Cussler novels
- Lorac: An Adventure to Save the Ocean - https://imwithlorac.com/
- Indie graphic novels: "*Earth Before Us,*" "*Ocean Renegades: Journey through the Paleozoic Era*"
- Non-fiction comics about various scientific topics, including Maris Wicks' *"Coral Reefs: Cities of the Ocean,"* Joe Flood's *"Sharks: Nature's Perfect Hunter,"*
- Independent adventure cartoonist, Lucy Bellwood, *"Baggywrinkles: A Lubber's Guide to Life at Sea,"* and Sarah Airriess "*The Worst Journey in the World,*"

Suggested activities
.
- **Commission** established, brilliant writers to write about the ocean.
- **Genres -** engage publishers or writers across different genres to include ocean stories into their mainstream

2. News media

Insights

- **Great news stories** – include great pictures, strong stories, break new boundaries, see the unseen, passion, seeing in real time, story at the heart of everything, take the viewer with you.
- **Think Global - Act Local** - to get people to care about issues, people need to understand how it links to them personally or locally (i.e. ocean data needs to be localised if possible when telling the story).
- **Planning** - engaging with the media at a very early stage (the planning stage) is important.
- **Access -** if you want to get media coverage, you need to give them access and at the heart of this relationship will need to be trust.

Positive examples

- Nasa's Earth Observations
- Sky (Ocean plastics)

- BBC (UK), NPR (US)
- Nautilus Ocean Channel
- National Geographic

Suggested activities

- Real time broadcasts from every major expedition at sea. Connecting with schools and the public.
- Ocean streaming channel with everything under one roof.
- Big multi device platform, go-to media spot.
- Uber style map, clicking on real-time missions. Viewer choice is key!
- News and education - need to do a better job of joining the two. Hundreds of journalism colleges in the world. This college is one that we know does this.
- Ocean Snapshots - our world today – a snapshot of oceans at a single moment in time
- A dedicated ocean news network (an office with staff and resources) of ocean news might serve ocean science programs well by acting as a clearinghouse.

3. Social Media

Insights

- **Positivity** – people often engage with social media that is positive – include more ocean stories that inspire through social media.
- **Engagement** - going beyond the fog-horn of one-way broadcast is essential when building audience engagement on social media – i.e. reply to comments, stay positive. Be inclusive and comment on threads, mention people in tweets etc. to increase awareness and followers.
- **Storytelling** – use the platforms to tell stories, good story-telling cuts through on social media. Often emotional stories are a good way to engage with an audience.
- **Quality** – some accounts tweet too much and don't stay on topic. They seem unfocussed and that makes you unfollow them. Don't tweet everything but stay in your field. Quality over quantity.
- **Humanity** – people will care for things they love, and they love what they know. People love seeing stories of other people, so include photos and topics with people, for example, what differences people are making on a personal level.

Positive examples

- NASA
- Open Ocean Exploration
- The Shark Trust
- The Ocean Foundation
- OCearch
- OceanX
- Raven the Science Maven
- OneOcean Flotilla

Suggested activities

- **Communications Training** – communications experts in the ocean community should have some science training and scientists should have more communications training.
- **Collaboration** – the scientific community should collaborate far more, for instance sharing influencer contacts and join their messaging. OneOcean Flotilla does an excellent job of this
- **Cross-sector education** – create opportunities to allow people to get a science degree with a communication or business minor. Those who are older should train the next generation – regardless of age.

4. Gaming

Insights

- **Positioning** – gaming must stop perpetuating the false dichotomy that "space is fun and the ocean is dangerous".
- **Access** - games and similar experiences can provide access to communities who otherwise do not have the infrastructure or resources to explore the ocean.
- **Immersion** – games are attractive because they provide an enjoyable escape, even if they make a connection with reality.
- **Agency** – games are also popular because they give the player control over their environment and actions.
- **Resources** – game development requires resources – the right talent, budget, launch strategy, and an appealing storyline/quest.

Positive examples

- Game makers alliances – e.g. Playing 4 the Planet – biggest companies in the video games industry have committed to harness the power of their platforms to take action on the climate crisis. Supported by UNEP. Managed to get games to commit to initiatives – mobile companies giving "nudges" during games – reached over 100 million gamers. Supported by Apple, Google etc.
- Citizen Science games -Fold It and Eyewire ,
- Beyond Blue
- Bioshock – one of the world's largest gaming franchises with over 38 million sales, it is set in an underwater city. Critically acclaimed for its strong morality-based storyline and for demonstrating the medium of video games as an art form, it is the basis for spin-off books, artwork, and a possible film.

Suggested activities

- **Simulators -** live streams from a deep dive and integrate that into a live gaming experience
- **Space vs Ocean** – use gaming platforms to create ocean games that are mission orientated and promote human exceptionalism, whilst also showcasing how we can improve the future. Convert every successful space game into an ocean setting.

5. Food

Insights

- **Equity in education** – to increase awareness of the source of food, what the data is showing, and the impact that unsustainable fishing can have, we need to tackle equity in education to ensure all people can have access to and understand this knowledge.
- **QR Codes -** easy technology that should be included on packaging – scan to find out the source of your food.
- **Stories about food –** create strong and uplifting stories to raise an appreciation for the importance and value of food from the sea and inspire positive action
- **Dialogues** - have conversations with communities to ensure their needs are addressed instead of just telling them facts and assuming they will respond

Suggested activities

- **Free educational resources -** create more hands-on and engaging educational activities for the public that are uplifting and community-based to inspire greater knowledge about the source of fish.
- **Mandated ocean curriculums** in schools to educate about seafood and the ocean in general

6. Art & the Arts

Insights

- **Love -** we protect what we love and art can be a powerful way to inspire people about why they love the ocean and galvanising action.
- **Beauty -** beautiful paintings engage the heart and can remind people why the ocean is special
- **Mystery -** art is a tangible way of highlighting a sense of magic or mystique about the ocean thereby engaging audiences with a different response to the ocean.
- **Art and Science -** scientists are invigorated by working with artists and together, they can provide unique ways to translate scientific knowledge and discovery into art for the public.
- **Confront the fear -** the ocean is often seen as a scary place and this has been deep rooted in an old aesthetic presented in art featuring 'There be dragons' or a place of hostility for fishers and sailors. The arts can challenge this and present a new view of the ocean as we saw through the film Finding Dory.

Positive Examples

- Heart of Water Global- a living gallery combining the emerging sciences and humanities with water running through all their stories.
- Ian Urbina's Outlaw Music Project

Suggested activities

- **Interactivity** – people should "do" - give people a place to draw and paint seascapes so they invest the time and emotion into their own creation. This is easier for those who live by the ocean but establish targeted art classes inland as well. Instead of just listening to lectures or visiting an art exhibit.
- **Create** – develop projects that engage people, such as creating a raft. Look into how art can make ocean exploration exciting.

7. Fashion

Insights

- **Fashion can promote ocean messaging -** fashion can provide individuals with a way to share and promote their values to others and shape other people's opinions. Fashion brands could therefore include more positive messaging around the ocean e.g. I'm someone for the ocean, I care about the ocean.
- **Circular Economy and fashion** – as active or activist consumers, we can choose to purchase fashion that is produced within the circular economy, thereby reducing impact on the ocean.

Positive Examples

- [Finisterre Clothing](#) - outdoor clothes based in Cornwall
- [Seasalt](#) – indoor and outdoor clothes for women, based in Cornwall
- Poseidon Army on Facebook

Suggested activities

- **Sustainability -** look at the next ocean trend – partner with a fashion brand but weave in sustainability. Reach out to mass market companies like Target – who have huge sway – and connect with their sustainability departments.
- **Stores -** projects with high end fashion stores like Selfridges – designers challenged with creating new designs based on an ocean theme.
- **Messaging -** including messaging on clothing (e.g. fish puns?) as science papers alone won't heal the ocean – but fashion can give us an unique opportunity to think about the connection between what we wear and the ocean and gateways to education.
- **Recycle / Reuse -** create more fashion using marine debris
- **Fashionable Clothes -** partner with designers to create smart, fashionable, and sustainable office clothing and everyday wear, beyond the casual e.g. blouses, ties, suits, skirts

8. Sports

Insights

- **Human element** – best sports stories have to have a human element – underdog, overcoming insurmountable challenge, fun and adventure – this can be a way to connect more people with the ocean.

- **Connect with world beyond sport** – to pop culture and/or have positive message that provides an escape from worries of reality

Positive Examples

- The Ocean Race

Suggested activities

- **Short form ocean content** - interweave sports content with bite size ocean content (during commercials for example).
- **Sports & Education** - utilising ocean related sports as a portal into ocean literacy for young people.
- **Use Sports to make people feel like they can contribute** – be involved in sports and the ocean.